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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3439
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000723

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI BECOMES PM-DESIGNATE, BUT TENSIONS
REMAIN

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Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Saad Hariri formally became Prime Minister-designate on Saturday, June 27. Opposition Christian leader Michel Aoun and Hizballah have neither endorsed Hariri nor committed to participating in the government Hariri will now try to form. However, Aoun continues to insist that a unity government with either proportional representation or veto power should be used as the formula. Despite Hariri and opposition-aligned Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri publicly endorsing each other, spurts of violence over the weekend between Hariri's Mustaqbal party supporters and Berri's Amal party supporters suggest tensions are high and the message of support has not filtered downwards. Procedurally, Lebanon's political process is moving forward, but it will neither be easy nor without setbacks. End summary.

HARIRI DESIGNATED
PRIME MINISTER

2. (SBU) By midday on Saturday, June 27, Saad Hariri had secured 85 (of 128) votes through President Michel Sleiman's constitutionally-mandated consultations with the various parliamentary blocs and parliamentarians, and Sleiman designated Hariri Prime Minister-designate. In his remarks from the presidential palace following his nomination, Hariri committed himself to forming a government that would preserve the state's institutions, sovereignty and independence, while at the same time ensuring continued economic prosperity and development. He called Lebanon's challenges "real and serious," but said they represent also many opportunities. While Hariri invoked the images of the "martyrs of freedom and independence," he stated his intention to form an efficient government that respects Lebanon's democratic system, the Taif Accord, and unites Lebanese citizens "in the face of Israeli threats."

3. (SBU) Hariri's nomination was endorsed by

opposition-aligned Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, despite comments in previous days suggesting Berri might not support Hariri. Neither Hizballah nor opposition Christian leader Michel Aoun supported Hariri's nomination; saying instead that their support was conditional on Hariri's ability to form a unity government. Aoun continues to insist on a cabinet that is based on either "proportional representation" (for instance, Aoun's bloc naming 50% of the 15 Christian seats) or one that allows for a "blocking third" veto power for the opposition. (Note: Hariri met with Aoun on June 28 during his mandatory consultations with former PMs. Hariri described the meeting "as a good one" without further elaboration. End note.) Hariri and his March 14 coalition allies have indicated they prefer a cabinet distribution with 16 seats for the majority, four seats for President Sleiman, and ten seats for the opposition in a 30-member cabinet.

HARIRI AND BERRI
ENDORSE EACH OTHER,
BUT SUPPORTERS CLASH

¶4. (C) Despite the public endorsements from members of the political opposition for Hariri's nomination, armed clashes between supporters of Hariri's Mustaqbal and Nabih Berri's Amal party on June 28 left one person dead. March 14 Christian leader Samir Geagea told the Ambassador June 29 that the violence had spread quickly (septel). Geagea, who had gone to meet with Hariri just blocks from where some of the clashes took place, said the violence traced a Sunni-Shia dividing line from the seaside through West Beirut south to the Hizballah-controlled southern suburbs. Eyewitnesses in the neighborhoods where fighting occurred noted the presence of "masked men" with weapons on the streets for a short time

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before the incident occurred. Reportedly, Lebanese Armed Forces soldiers effectively intervened to end the incident, but did not act before receiving a direct order to shoot.

¶5. (C) Minister of Culture Tamam Salaam called the incident "unacceptable" and said he had telephoned LAF Commander Jean Kahwagi about it. Kahwagi, reportedly, told Salaam that the LAF would take "firm measures" to prevent similar incidents in the future. In addition, Salaam expressed disappointment at the absence of Internal Security Forces (the police) in the area and the lack of comment by Minister of Interior Ziad Baroud. Berri's senior advisor, Ali Hamdan, said on June 29 that the clashes were distracting public opinion away from other developments, such as Druze leader Walid Jumblatt's statements that, Hamdan claimed, his party would not participate in the cabinet.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) While the political process is moving forward according to procedure, it is unlikely the cabinet formation will occur without lengthy negotiations. Constitutionally, there is no deadline by which Hariri must form the next government. The violent clashes between supporters of opposing political parties have been isolated thus far, but reflect tensions that existed before the June 7 elections. Conciliatory messages between the political leaders either are not filtering downwards or are not being heeded. End comment.

SISON